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CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE QUESTION OF: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Written statement*/ submitted by Reporters without Borders-International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[1 February 2001]

*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received in English and French from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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ENG

PRESS FREEDOM IN IRAN

On 31 January 2001, eleven journalists are imprisoned for sentences from four months to ten years. Since April 2000, more than 30 reformist publications have been banned. This wave of arrests is part of a larger effort by conservatives to repress press freedom. Following their defeat in the February legislative elections, the regime's hardliners launched an attack against reformers and their key supporters, the press.

On 17 April, the outgoing Iranian parliament, dominated by conservatives, notably adopted a controversial bill, reinforcing sanctions for violations of the press law. This law bans a newspaper that has been suspended from being published under another name. This practice was widely used by reformist newspapers that were banned in 1999: *Salam* became *Bayan*, *Neshat* gave way to *Asr-E-Azdegan* and *Khordad* changed its name to *Fath*. Another clause in the law stipulates that "those who belong to or sympathise with counter-revolutionary groups or illegal political organisations, those sentenced by the revolutionary courts for damaging state security, and those who distribute propaganda hostile to the Islamic government are in no circumstances authorised to be employed by a publication." That means that journalists who have already been convicted of offences will never again be allowed to practise their profession. The law also states that the granting of a publication licence requires "prior approval from the intelligence, justice and police ministry". In the past, only the approval of the culture ministry was necessary. Under the new law, the content of publications may be regarded as the responsibility not only of publishing managers but also of the journalist who wrote the offending material, who is then regarded as an accomplice to the offence. Other clauses in the law ban "any direct or indirect foreign aid to newspapers" and the publication of articles criticising the constitution. In August, the parliament tried to reform the law, but the effort was blocked by Ayatollah Khamenei.

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Morteza Firouzi, editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Iran News*, was arrested in May 1997. After a trial held in camera in January 1998, the journalist was sentenced to death for "adultery" and "spying for Japan, South Korea and France". On 3 June 1998, shortly before the execution was due to take place, the supreme court quashed the death sentence and referred the case back to a regional court. There has been no news of the journalist since.

On 27 November 1999, the special clerical court sentenced Abdollah Nouri, managing editor of the daily *Khordad*, to five years' imprisonment and a fine of 15 million rials (5,000 euros). It also ordered the closure of his newspaper and banned him from working as a journalist for five years. He was charged with "anti-religious propaganda", "insults against Imam Khomeyni", "destabilisation of public opinion", "contact with the United States", etc.

On 10 April 2000, the appeal court sentenced Mashallah Shamsolvaezin, editor of the daily *Asr-E-Azdegan* and former editor of the banned daily *Neshat*, to two and a half years in jail for "attacking Islam". The press court had given him a three-year sentence in November 1999.

On 23 April, Latif Safari, managing editor of the banned reformist daily *Neshat*, was jailed. In November 1999 he had been sentenced by the press court to two and a half years' imprisonment and banned from all journalistic activity. His newspaper *Neshat* had been banned in September 1999 for publishing articles in which it gave a modern view of islam regarding to the death sentence.

On 29 May, Emadoddine Baghi was taken into custody after a hearing before the press court. On 17 July, he was sentenced to five and half years' imprisonment for "attacking national security" and "publishing false information" because he gave a modern view of islam regarding to the death sentence in the daily *Neshat* in September 1999. On 23 October, the appeal court reduced Emadoldin Baghi's sentence to three years' imprisonnment.

On 30 December, the hodjatoleslam (religious title) Ali Afsahi, editor-in-chief of the cultural and sport publication *Cinama-Varzech* was sentenced to four months' imprisonment by the Special Court of the Clergy. The clergyman and editor-in-chief was arrested after his trial and convicted for "insulting and libelling the clergy".

On 13 January 2001, four journalists; Khalil Rostamkhani, Akbar Ganji, Ezzatollah Sahabi and Meranghiz Kar were sentenced for periods from four to ten years. With the exception of Khalil Rostamkhani, who did not take part; Akbar Ganji, Ezzatollah Sahabi and Meranghiz Kar participated in a conference held in Berlin on April 7 and 8, 2000 under the title "Iran after the elections". The gathering was termed "anti-Islamic" and "anti-revolutionary" by Iranian television, which broadcast part of it on April 18. The journalists, who are mostly relatives or supporters of President Khatami, were accused of having "damaged national security".

Akbar Ganji, journalist with *Sobh-é- Emrouz*, was jailed for ten years and; at the end of his sentence to internal exile (meaning no right to leave the country nor to live in Teheran). The journalist, imprisoned since April 22 at Evine jail in Teheran, said during one hearing in his trial that he had been tortured. Besides his participation in the controversial conference, he was accused of having implicated in his articles Iranian personalities - including former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsandjani and former Information Minister Ali Fallahian - in the murder of opposition figures and intellectuals in late 1998.

Khalil Rostamkhani; journalist with the *Daily News* and *Iran Echo* and the director of a translation agency, was jailed for nine years for organising the conference even though he did not actually attend. Arrested on 8 May 2000, he was released on bail on 15 November.

Ezzatollah Sahabi, editor of the newspapaper *Iran-é-Farda*, was sentenced to four and a half years in jail, He was arrested on 26 June 2000 then released on bail on August 21. He was rearrested on December 17 and was recently transfered to a unknown place.

Meranghiz Kar, a writer, journalist for several reformist publications, and a lawyer, was jailed for four years. She was arrested on April 29, 2000 then released on bail on June 21.

Three other imprisoned journalists are waiting for the verdict of their trial.
Hassan Yussefi Echkevari; journalist with *Neshat* and *Iran-é-Farda*, has been accused of "subversive activities against national security" and "defaming the authorities", "damaging the standing of the clergy" and of being a "mohareb" (fighter against God). Jailed since August 5 2000, his sentence has never been made public. He is at risk of the death penalty.

On 7 August 2000, Ahmad Zeid-Abadi, journalist with the daily Hamchahri, was arrested at home. In October he complained about the insecurity in the part of the prison in which he was detained.

On 28 January 2001, Hoda Saber, one of the editors of the banned monthly *Iran-é-Farda*, was imprisoned. His wife, who stated that she is not aware of the reason for his arrest, is very concerned because she does not know where her husband is detained.